



# George Buchanan and Mary Queen of Scots

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It is something of an historical curiosity, if only a minor one, that Mary Queen of Scots' relations with George Buchanan have attracted much less serious attention from modern historians than her relations with John Knox.<sup>1</sup> Reasons for this are not hard to find. Knox, after all, provided wonderfully detailed accounts of his "interviews" with Mary that capture all-too-vividly the deep religious and political divisions generated by the processes of reform in Scotland. In the pages of his *History of the Reformation in Scotland*, the struggles between God and the Devil, the true church and the false, the crown and the community, are brought memorably to life in the dramatic encounters between the lowly preacher and the haughty queen.<sup>2</sup> In contrast, George Buchanan's *Rerum Scoticarum Historia*, first published in 1582, offered an account of the events of the 1560s that is not just notoriously one-sided, but is also as a result dramatically colourless. Moreover, his relentless denigration of Mary, begun in his infamous *Detectio Mariae Reginae Scotorum* of 1571, and continued a decade later on the broader canvas of the *Historia*, has the effect of draining her of any real substance or character. Knox no doubt applauded the appearance of Buchanan's *Detectio*, the work that did so much to fix the image of Mary as an adulterer and a murderer, a lascivious whore and vicious tyrant. Yet, while Knox's Mary is a more or less believable character, an individual with a distinct personality, Buchanan's Mary is oddly distant and disembodied, an assemblage of stereotypes devoid of individuality.

The irony of this is, of course, that Buchanan was much more closely acquainted with Mary than Knox ever was. A former intimate of the queen, with whom she had spent evenings reading Livy, and on whom she had bestowed favour and reward, Buchanan was uniquely well placed to portray the queen in human terms. Under the circumstances, one can only lament that, unlike Knox, Buchanan was

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<sup>1</sup> For a recent example, see Jenny Wormald, "Godly Reformer, Godless Monarch: John Knox and Mary Queen of Scots", in *John Knox and the British Reformations*, ed. R.A. Mason (Aldershot, 1998), 220-241.

<sup>2</sup> See *John Knox's History of the Reformation in Scotland*, ed. W.C. Dickinson (Edinburgh and London, 1949), ii, 13-20, 43-6, 71-2, 82-4, 94-9.

not moved to record his private conversations with the queen. Indeed, in stark contrast to Knox, Buchanan in his writings not only denied Mary virtually any voice at all, almost never allowing her to speak in the first person, but revealed nothing of his own relationship with her. Intent as he was on utterly destroying Mary's reputation, his polemical purposes would doubtless have been ill-served by endowing the young queen with the wit to debate with Scotland's greatest living classicist the merits of Livy's prose style – or, better still, the merits of his republican politics. There was, however, almost certainly more to Buchanan's reticence than this. After all, whereas Knox's hostility to Mary has at least the virtue of consistency, Buchanan demonstrably changed sides and, famously, repaid the queen's patronage with vitriol. Their former intimacy was presumably not something that Buchanan would have wished to broadcast to the world.

The world was none the less aware of it, and, not surprisingly, estimations of Buchanan's character for long turned on interpretations of his relationship with Mary. Throughout the early-modern period and beyond, generations of Whig-Presbyterians revered Buchanan as a man of principle and integrity, upholding the rule of law in the face of Mary's egregious tyranny, while Mary's many supporters, Catholics and Episcopalians, Jacobites and Tories, reviled him as a venal traitor, peddling scurrilous lies on behalf of Mary's villainous half-brother, the Regent Moray.<sup>3</sup> To be sure, both sides might unite to applaud the dazzling virtuosity of Buchanan's Latin style – and it was of course a Jacobite, Thomas Ruddiman, who produced in the early eighteenth century the first and only edition of Buchanan's complete works.<sup>4</sup> Yet, so long as Mary's deposition remained a politically sensitive issue, and

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<sup>3</sup> The ideological battles over Buchanan's legacy are traced from various perspectives in David Allan, *Virtue, Learning and the Scottish Enlightenment: Ideas of Scholarship in Early Modern History* (Edinburgh, 1993); Colin Kidd, *Subverting Scotland's Past: Scottish Whig Historians and the Creation of an Anglo-British Identity, 1689-1830* (Cambridge, 1993); and William Ferguson, *The Identity of the Scottish Nation: An Historic Quest* (Edinburgh, 1998).

<sup>4</sup> *Georgii Buchanani ... Opera Omnia*, ed. Thomas Ruddiman (Edinburgh, 1714-15); a further edition of the *Opera Omnia* appeared at Leiden in 1725 with a preface by the Dutch scholar Peter Burmann. On Ruddiman's edition, see Douglas Duncan, *Thomas Ruddiman: A Study in Scottish Scholarship of the Early Eighteenth Century* (Edinburgh, 1965), esp. 62-71.

so long as sectarian loyalties continued to shape interpretations of the Reformation, opinions of Buchanan remained deeply divided and passionately held. Only in the last century has the heat finally gone out of the debate. Indeed, so precipitately has the temperature dropped that it would seem that, as regards the Marian controversy, Buchanan now has neither sworn enemies nor die-hard friends. His sole recent biographer, I.D. McFarlane, mounts only a half-hearted defence of Buchanan's treatment of Mary, describing him as at best "an amanuensis of a high order" and at worst a gullible hack.<sup>5</sup> Small wonder, then, that Mary's modern biographers can afford to adopt an air of lofty indifference to the man who first besmirched her name. Admittedly, the late Gordon Donaldson displayed some characteristic asperity when confronted with Buchanan's cavalier attitude to historical evidence.<sup>6</sup> But Jenny Wormald (hardly herself an admirer of Mary) dismisses Buchanan's anti-Marian writings simply, if rather splendidly, as "copy for the *Sun* in the style of the *Times*".<sup>7</sup>

The Marian controversy aside, however, it would be quite wrong to imply that modern scholarship has treated Buchanan with indifference or disdain. Certainly, he has suffered in comparison with Knox from having written almost exclusively in Latin rather than English. Nevertheless, we now have excellent modern editions and translations of some of his poetry and plays,<sup>8</sup> while John Durkan's invaluable bibliography of his writings surely puts beyond doubt Buchanan's stature and influence in the cosmopolitan Latin culture of early-modern Europe.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, historians of political thought have continued to excavate the sources and significance of his ideas and to explore their

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<sup>5</sup> I.D. McFarlane, *Buchanan* (London, 1981), 488-9. Cf. Peter Hume Brown's much more spirited defence in *George Buchanan: Humanist and Reformer* (Edinburgh, 1890), esp. 200ff.

<sup>6</sup> Gordon Donaldson, *Mary Queen of Scots* (London, 1974), 181-2.

<sup>7</sup> Jenny Wormald, *Mary Queen of Scots: A Study in Failure* (London, 1988), 14.

<sup>8</sup> Philip J. Ford, *George Buchanan: Prince of Poets* (Aberdeen, 1982); *George Buchanan: Tragedies*, edd. P. Sharratt and P.G. Walsh (Edinburgh, 1983); *George Buchanan: Political Poetry*, edd. A. Williamson and P. McGinnis (Scottish History Society, 1995). The latter volume in fact appeared in 2000.

<sup>9</sup> *Bibliography of George Buchanan*, ed. J. Durkan (Glasgow, 1994).



impact both on his most famous pupil, James VI, and on Scottish, British and European political culture more generally.<sup>10</sup> In the light of such positive developments, one hesitates to drag Buchanan back into the mire of Marian controversy. However, in preparing a new edition of what is undoubtedly his most important political treatise, the *De iure regni apud Scotos Dialogus*, one is eventually left with little or no choice. For although not published until 1579, the *De iure regni* was first written in 1567-8, in the immediate aftermath of Mary's overthrow and with the express purpose of justifying the revolution against her. While blissfully free of the personal animus that characterises the *Detectio* and the *Historia*, it is none the less as much a part of Buchanan's anti-Marian onslaught as they are.

This paper, therefore, is essentially a by-product of work on the *De iure regni* and the need to come to grips with the immediate context in which Buchanan's political ideas were initially expressed. It is certainly not intended to re-open debate on the veracity of the charges that Buchanan levelled against Mary. His account of her rule is, manifestly, more fiction than fact, and W.A. Gatherer's excellent edition of the *Detectio* and the relevant books of the *Historia* – *The Tyrannous Reign of Mary Stewart* – does more than enough to expose the half-truths and lies that litter the pages of both works.<sup>11</sup> Rather, what follows has two more limited aims: first, to review such evidence as there is for Buchanan's relations with Mary and the circumstances in which the *De iure regni* and the *Detectio* were composed; and second, to try and elucidate why his portrait of the queen, particularly as developed in the *Historia*, took the precise (quasi-fictional) form that it did. Before addressing either of these issues, however, it is important to glance at some earlier aspects of Buchanan's biography that have significance both for the formation of his political philosophy and in explaining his response to the revolutionary events of the later 1560s.

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<sup>10</sup> See, for example, *Scots and Britons: Scottish Political Thought and the Union of 1603*, ed. R.A. Mason (Cambridge, 1994), Part II; J.H. Burns, *The True Law of Kingship: Concepts of Monarchy in Early Modern Scotland* (Oxford, 1996); Roger A. Mason, *Kingship and the Commonweal: Political Thought in Renaissance and Reformation Scotland* (East Linton, 1998). See also the important articles by Arthur H. Williamson cited in note 28 below.

<sup>11</sup> *The Tyrannous Reign of Mary Stewart: George Buchanan's Account*, ed. and trans. W.A. Gatherer (Edinburgh, 1958).

Neither before nor after his final return to Scotland in 1561 is the evidence for Buchanan's career either full or straightforward. Indeed, as his biographers have found, it is often enough impossible to pin down his movements far less his motives.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, in the period prior to 1561, there are a number of critical episodes in Buchanan's long and varied career which have some bearing on his relations with Mary and that are worth further comment here. It is, for example, undoubtedly significant that he was born, in 1506, close to the little village of Killearn, near Stirling, the fifth son of a lairdly family that had seen better financial days. The area of his birth was in the early sixteenth century predominantly Gaelic-speaking, and there is every reason to think that Buchanan was a native Gaelic speaker;<sup>13</sup> but it was also, and more pertinently for present purposes, very much Lennox territory, dominated by the branch of the Stewart family to which Mary Queen of Scots' second husband, Henry Stewart, Lord Darnley, belonged. There is no reason to doubt that Buchanan, like most contemporary Scots, was swayed by the claims of family and kin and that a sense of hereditary attachment to the Lennox Stewarts came powerfully into play during the events following Mary's marriage to Darnley in 1565. Certainly, as we shall see, the account of these events in the *Historia* exhibits a pronounced pro-Lennox bias that combined with other factors to fuel Buchanan's palpable dislike and mistrust of the Queen of Scots.

To return to his early career, however, it is clear that, despite his family's straitened financial circumstances, Buchanan received a first-rate university education, initially financed by a rich maternal uncle,

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<sup>12</sup> The biographical information that follows is drawn largely from McFarlane, *Buchanan*, and Hume Brown, *Buchanan*. Buchanan's own tantalisingly brief *Vita* can be found in Latin and English translation in *The Trial of George Buchanan before the Lisbon Inquisition*, ed. J.M. Aitken (Edinburgh, 1939), pp. xiv-xxvii.

<sup>13</sup> McFarlane, *Buchanan*, 19, quotes Ninian Winzet's remark in his *Flagellum sectariorum* (1582) to the effect that Buchanan's mother was a Gaelic speaker. The philological arguments of the early books of the *Historia* also strongly suggest Buchanan's familiarity with Gaelic: see Ferguson, *Identity of the Scottish Nation*, 79-80, 87-8.

James Heriot.<sup>14</sup> Thus he was able to study in the first instance at Paris between 1520 and 1522, then at St Andrews where he graduated with a bachelor's degree in 1525, and then again at Paris where he took his master's degree in 1528, and where for the following three years he was engaged as a regent at the Collège de Sainte-Barbe. Among the early influences on his intellectual development, the figure of his fellow countryman, the formidable logician, philosopher and theologian, John Mair (or Major) of Haddington, inevitably looms large. Mair had for many years been a leading presence at the Sorbonne before returning to Scotland in 1518 to teach initially at Glasgow and then St Andrews. Buchanan was not only dispatched to St Andrews to study with this renowned scholar, but was clearly drawn back to Paris by Mair's decision to return there in 1526. We can be fairly sure, therefore, that from an early age Buchanan was exposed to the strand of radical scholastic philosophy of which Mair was a leading exponent. More particularly, Mair's well-attested conciliarism – his belief that popes were accountable to councils of the church just as monarchs were accountable to assemblies of their subjects – would not be lost on his youthful pupil.<sup>15</sup>

Mair's ideas, however, were developed according to the tenets of a traditional scholastic method that was coming under increasingly heavy attack from a new breed of humanist intellectual, typified by Erasmus of Rotterdam.<sup>16</sup> Impatient of what they saw as the tortuous logic-chopping of the schools, they championed instead the language and literature of antiquity and an educational philosophy rooted in the study

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<sup>14</sup> As he put it in his *Vita*, he came "of a family noted for its length of pedigree rather than its abundance of possessions" (Aitken, *Buchanan and the Lisbon Inquisition*, p. xv).

<sup>15</sup> For Mair's biography, see Aeneas Mackay, "The Life of the Author", in John Mair, *A History of Greater Britain as well England as Scotland*, ed. and trans. Archibald Constable (Scottish History Society, 1892), and J.H. Burns, "New Light on John Major", *Innes Review*, 5 (1954), 83-100. His political philosophy is most fully analysed in Burns, *True Law of Kingship*, 39-75, while his conciliarist writings can be sampled in *Conciliarism and Papalism*, edd. J.H. Burns and T.M. Izbicki (Cambridge, 1997).

<sup>16</sup> For what follows, see generally Charles G. Nauert Jr., *Humanism and the Culture of Renaissance Europe* (Cambridge, 1995); *The Cambridge History of Political Thought, 1450-1700*, ed. J.H. Burns (Cambridge, 1991), esp. chs. 4-5.



of classical grammar and rhetoric. To Mair, now in his sixties, the intellectual ferment of Paris in the later 1520s proved less than congenial. Not only was his intellectual method under assault, but the rapid spread of Lutheranism also posed a grave threat to his Catholic orthodoxy. His final return to St Andrews in 1531, where he would remain until his death in 1550, marked a retreat from intellectual debates that had become, quite literally, matters of life and death. To Buchanan, however, still in his twenties, the Paris of these years must have been as intellectually exhilarating as it was physically dangerous. As well as exposing him both to Lutheranism and Erasmian evangelicalism, it also led him to a definitive rejection of Mair's scholasticism in favour of a more fashionable commitment to classical philology and humanist educational method. In 1533, he nailed his intellectual colours firmly to the mast in his first published work, a version of Thomas Linacre's *Rudiments* that was at once a textbook of Latin grammar and a manifesto of humanist educational philosophy.<sup>17</sup>

For the next three decades, Buchanan made a highly precarious living as an itinerant humanist tutor and teacher. The point is an important one: the fifth son of an impoverished family, Buchanan had few if any personal resources and, aside from the early support of his uncle, lived the rest of his life off his own wits and the patronage of others. Poverty and insecurity as well as indifferent health were constant companions throughout his career. It is conceivable that in the early 1530s Buchanan considered taking holy orders as a means of ensuring a more stable future, but at this stage in his career the priesthood was an unlikely option for an aspiring humanist intellectual who was shortly to achieve considerable notoriety for his pronounced anti-clericalism. Instead, Buchanan initially secured employment as tutor to the young Gilbert Kennedy, third earl of Cassillis (1517-58), whom he first encountered in Paris, but with whom he returned to Scotland in 1534 or 1535. There, in 1536, his contract with Cassillis coming to an end, he was engaged as tutor to the eldest of King James V's illegitimate sons, James *senior* (d. 1557), abbot-commendator of

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<sup>17</sup> Durkan, *Bibliography*, pp. ix-x, 1-29; McFarlane, *Buchanan*, 42-7. The work, which included a version of Juan Luis Vives' famous humanist educational treatise, *De ratione studii puerilis*, proved immensely popular and went through some twenty-six (mainly French) editions between 1533 and 1559.



Kelso and Melrose, who had been born in 1529/30 to Elizabeth Shaw of Sauchie.<sup>18</sup> Buchanan's association with the royal household, however, did not last long: commissioned by the king to write a series of scathing satires against the Franciscans, his *Somnium* and *Franciscanus* so incensed Cardinal David Beaton that early in 1539 Buchanan was forced to abandon his post and flee the country. Initially intent on settling in England, Buchanan found the religious climate there no less volatile and dangerous than contemporary Scotland.<sup>19</sup> By the autumn of 1539, after only six months in England, he had returned once again to France.

In France, Paris proving as dangerously volatile as London, Buchanan eventually settled in the south-west, where he initially found employment at the Collège de Guyenne in Bordeaux, and where he was to spend most of the next eight years.<sup>20</sup> It was one of the more stable periods of Buchanan's life, notable for the production of his two original Latin dramas, *Jephtha* and *The Baptist*, as well as his emergence as an accomplished Greek scholar, evident in his translations into Latin verse of Euripides' plays *Medea* and *Alcestis*.<sup>21</sup> At the same time, he developed long-lasting friendships with fellow humanists such as Elie Vinet, Nicolas de Grouchy, and the principal of the Collège de Guyenne, André de Gouvea. It was as a consequence of his close association with the latter that, when in 1547 André de Gouvea accepted an invitation from the Portuguese king, John III, to preside over a humanist College of Arts at the University of Coimbra,

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<sup>18</sup> Jamie Cameron, *James V: The Personal Rule, 1528-1542* (East Linton, 1998), 205, 261; Peter D. Anderson, *Robert Stewart, Earl of Orkney, Lord of Shetland, 1533-1593* (Edinburgh, 1982), 1-5.

<sup>19</sup> Buchanan recalled in his *Vita* that "at that juncture English politics were so confused that men of both religious parties were being burnt on the same day and in the same fire" (Aitken, *Buchanan and the Lisbon Inquisition*, p. xix). For further details, see John Durkan, "Scots 'Evangelicals' in the patronage of Thomas Cromwell", *Records of the Scottish Church History Society*, 21 (1982), 127-56, esp. 134.

<sup>20</sup> Buchanan was certainly teaching at Guyenne between 1539 and 1542 and again between 1545 and 1547, when he famously numbered Montaigne among his pupils. The intervening period, which may have been spent in Paris, remains very obscure. See McFarlane, *Buchanan*, 78-103.

<sup>21</sup> Versions of all four are to be found in Sharratt and Walsh, *Buchanan: Tragedies*.

Buchanan was among the Guyenne faculty recruited to accompany him. De Gouvea was to die suddenly the following year, but this proved the least of the woes that were now to befall Buchanan, for in 1549 he was imprisoned and put on trial for heresy by the Lisbon Inquisition.<sup>22</sup> The precise nature of the charges levelled against him by the Lisbon authorities is perhaps less important here than the fact that the proceedings against him reveal, not just that his strong evangelical and anti-clerical views had remained undiminished by his experience at the Scottish court, but that he had subsequently dabbled (and probably much more than dabbled) with unorthodox theological beliefs. Given the religious climate of the 1530s and 1540s, and given the intellectual circles in which Buchanan moved, it is hardly surprising that he should be found testing – and transgressing – the bounds of theological orthodoxy.<sup>23</sup> What is perhaps more surprising is that the Lisbon Inquisition let him off so lightly. Having abjured the heresies of which he was charged – and done penance by working on what would be his most enduringly popular and most frequently reprinted book, his metrical Latin paraphrases of the Psalms<sup>24</sup> – he was released in February 1552 and returned to France the following year.

Once back in France, Buchanan was eventually, in 1554 or 1555, engaged as tutor to Timoléon de Cossé, son of the Maréchal de Brissac, the commander of the French armies in Italy. As a result, Buchanan spent the next few years shuttling between northern Italy, where the Marshal's military commitments generally confined him, and the family's estates in Normandy. At the same time, however, his association with this powerful noble family brought him into direct contact with the royal court of the French king, Henry II, who in 1557 appointed Buchanan's young charge as a page to his own son, the future Charles IX. Given the impending marriage of Mary, Queen of Scots to the heir to the French throne, the Dauphin Francis, it was an auspicious enough moment for a Gallicised Scot to exploit such court

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<sup>22</sup> For full details and documentation of the trial, see Aitken, *Buchanan and the Lisbon Inquisition*.

<sup>23</sup> The range of Buchanan's contacts and the their possible influence on his religious views at this time are discussed in McFarlane, *Buchanan*, 103-10; see also Buchanan, *Political Poetry*, pp. 6ff., for details of his important links with Portuguese New Christians.

<sup>24</sup> Durkan, *Bibliography*, 71-157.

connections. Indeed, it would appear that Buchanan now saw his future as lying firmly in France, for in 1557, through de Brissac's good offices, he was granted letters of naturalisation by the French king which allowed him to receive ecclesiastical patronage from the Marshal in the form of a canonry in Normandy. While such clerical preferment did not necessarily mean that he had taken holy orders, recent research has revealed that, despite his well-attested anti-clericalism, Buchanan did in fact enter the priesthood.<sup>25</sup> Whether he did so from conviction or convenience is a matter to which we must return. Meanwhile, it will suffice to note that his Catholic orthodoxy as well as his new found court connections found full public expression in a series of three important ceremonial poems composed between 1558 and 1560.

The first of these celebrated the re-capture of Calais from the English in 1558, a triumph essentially for the Queen of Scots' Guise relatives whose military prowess in the cause of "our father in Rome" Buchanan was now happy to endorse.<sup>26</sup> The second (much more famous) poem celebrated the marriage of Mary and Francis in April 1558, enthusiastically supporting a union of the French and Scottish crowns while simultaneously defending the high antiquity and integrity of the Scottish kingdom.<sup>27</sup> Undoubtedly, these two poems deserve much more serious consideration than it is possible to give them here. Arthur Williamson's suggestion that they are to be read as not just pro-Valois but anti-Habsburg, prompted by fears of a universal monarchy encompassing the New World as well as the Old, certainly helps to square them with Buchanan's avowed suspicion of both commerce and empire.<sup>28</sup> Yet, however that may be, Valois France proved in the end a

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<sup>25</sup> Elizabeth Bonner, "French Naturalization of the Scots in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries", *Historical Journal*, 40 (1997), 1085-1115, esp. 1096.

<sup>26</sup> *Ad invictissimum Franciae Regem Henricum II post victos Caletes*, in Buchanan, *Political Poetry*, 76-83, esp. lines 73ff.

<sup>27</sup> *Francisci Valesi et Mariae Stuartae, Regum Franciae et Scotiae, Epithalamium*, in *ibid.*, 126-45.

<sup>28</sup> See *ibid.*, 24-27, and three further articles by Arthur H. Williamson: "Scots, Indians and Empire: The Scottish Politics of Civilization, 1519-1609", *Past & Present*, 150 (1996), 46-83; "George Buchanan, Civic Virtue and Commerce: European Imperialism and its Sixteenth-Century Critics", *Scottish Historical Review*, 75 (1996), 20-37; and "Unnatural Empire: George Buchanan, Anti-Imperialism and the Sixteenth-Century Syphilis Pandemic", in



shaky enough bulwark against Habsburg ambition. The sudden death of Henry II in July 1559 brought Francis and Mary to the French throne, but also brought simmering religious and dynastic rivalries to the boil. Long before the death of Francis some eighteen months later in December 1560, the French kingdom was showing every sign of collapsing into bitter civil war. The third and last of Buchanan's ceremonial poems, a lament on the death of King Francis II, is understandably a much more sombre affair than his previous celebratory efforts, reflecting bitterly on the internal disorders and foreign humiliations that were crowding in on the French monarchy.<sup>29</sup> For Buchanan, indeed, the poem was something of a leave-taking, for within a year of the young king's death he had abandoned France for Scotland.

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Among the foreign humiliations to which Buchanan referred in his lament for Francis, he might well have counted the successful Scottish Protestant rebellion of 1559-60 that had witnessed not only the death of Mary of Guise but also France's military capitulation to England.<sup>30</sup> The result was the establishment in Scotland of a provisional government that, while nominally in allegiance to the French crown, in reality owed its existence to the new English queen, Elizabeth Tudor. Mary Stewart's decision, following the death of Francis, to return to Scotland to rule as a Catholic queen over an at least nominally Protestant kingdom, helped clarify the Scots' dynastic loyalties but further complicated an already volatile religious situation. Moreover, both the religious and the political *status quo* were always likely to be upset by the issue of the queen's marriage and, more broadly, by Mary's Catholic claim to the English throne.<sup>31</sup> In some respects, Buchanan

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*Everything Connects: In Conference with Richard Popkin*, edd. J.E. Force and D.S. Katz (Leiden, 1999), 340-59.

<sup>29</sup> *Deploratio status rei Gallicae, sub mortem Francisci Secundi Regis*, in Buchanan, *Political Poetry*, 144-7.

<sup>30</sup> For fuller accounts of what follows, see Michael Lynch, *Scotland: A New History* (London, 1991), 186-224; Gordon Donaldson, *Scotland: James V-James VII* (Edinburgh, 1965), 85-131.

<sup>31</sup> For different perspectives on Mary's reign, see *Mary Stewart: Queen in Three Kingdoms*, ed. M. Lynch (Oxford, 1988); Wormald, *Mary Queen of Scots: A Study in Failure*; Donaldson, *Mary Queen of Scots*.



himself epitomised many of the ambiguities and tensions that underlay and would finally undermine Mary's brief personal rule in Scotland. For while on the one hand his return to Scotland was accompanied by a formal commitment to Protestantism, on the other hand he very quickly found a place in Mary's essentially Catholic household.

It is by no means clear either why or precisely when Buchanan returned to Scotland, or whether he was from the outset part of Mary's household. His employment by the Maréchal de Brissac appears to have terminated in 1560 and, now in his mid-fifties, with prospects in France looking distinctly gloomy, Buchanan may have seized the opportunity of returning to Scotland attached to a royal patron.<sup>32</sup> By this time his literary reputation was well established and the presence of such a distinguished man of letters at Mary's Scottish court could only enhance her image. It is possible, therefore, perhaps even probable given Buchanan's impecunious circumstances, that he returned to Scotland either in August 1561 as part of Mary's entourage or shortly thereafter on the understanding that he would be found a place in the royal household. The fact that he resigned his benefice in Normandy in May 1561 suggests that he had by then decided to leave France and that he had some assurance of a future income.<sup>33</sup> Certainly, he was in Scotland by November 1561, just three months after the queen, and received a payment from the royal accounts for the Martinmas term 1561.<sup>34</sup> By the beginning of the following year, his place at court was apparently well established, for on 30 January 1562, Thomas Randolph, the English ambassador in Scotland, reported to William Cecil that: "Ther is with the quene one called Mr. George Bowhanan, a Scottyshe man, verie well learned, that was the schollemaster unto Monsr. de Brissak's sone, very godlye and honeste".<sup>35</sup>

In the vocabulary of an early Elizabethan Englishman such as Thomas Randolph, a stout Protestant who was to become a firm friend to Buchanan, the phrase "godly and honest" has unmistakably

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<sup>32</sup> See McFarlane, *Buchanan*, 206-46, for fuller consideration of Buchanan's return to Scotland and his activities thereafter.

<sup>33</sup> The resignation took place by proxy on 18 May 1561: Bonner, "French Naturalization of the Scots", 1096.

<sup>34</sup> McFarlane, *Buchanan*, 207.

<sup>35</sup> *Calendar of State Papers relating to Scotland and Mary Queen of Scots* [CSP Scot.], ed. J. Bain et al. (Edinburgh, 1898-1969), i, 598.

Protestant connotations. Yet, if Buchanan had not only resigned his Catholic benefice but had already formally aligned himself with the reformed cause, it did not prove a barrier to close relations with Mary. By April 1562, Randolph was reporting from St Andrews that “the queene readeth daily after her dinner, instructed by a learned man, Mr. George Bowhannan, somewhat of Lyvie”.<sup>36</sup> It is often asserted on the basis of this that Buchanan was employed as tutor to the nineteen year-old queen. While not impossible, it seems more likely that Mary found congenial the company of a highly cultivated man who shared her experience of French culture and the French court. Certainly, she was sufficiently well disposed towards him to grant him an annual pension of £250, a not inconsiderable sum that she sought to double in October 1564 by granting him an income of £500 from the lands of Crossraguel Abbey.<sup>37</sup> That Buchanan was rarely able to uplift this income should not be allowed to detract from Mary’s generosity towards him. After all, his duties at court were hardly onerous and did not prevent him travelling abroad, possibly to the English court in 1563-4, but certainly to France in the winter of 1565-6.<sup>38</sup> Whilst in Scotland itself, aside from any (presumably intermittent) tutoring activities, he is known to have helped translate Spanish diplomatic correspondence on behalf of the Privy Council,<sup>39</sup> but was otherwise engaged only in composing court masques and commemorating in verse such great state occasions as occurred.

Among such occasions was, of course, Mary’s marriage to Henry Stewart, Lord Darnley, in July 1565. As an adherent of the Lennox family, Buchanan welcomed the marriage, despite its being conducted by Catholic rite, and he duly contributed to the celebratory verses and masques that accompanied the festivities.<sup>40</sup> Likewise, he both celebrated the birth of Mary’s son, James, in June 1566, and played a key role in scripting the elaborate Renaissance festival that

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<sup>36</sup> *CSP Scot.*, i, 615; John Durkan, “The Library of Mary, Queen of Scots”, in Lynch, *Mary Stewart*, 71-104, at 82-3.

<sup>37</sup> For full details of these grants and the subsequent wrangling over the revenues, see McFarlane, *Buchanan*, 213-5.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 235-7 (on the possibility of a visit to England) and 237-45 (on France).

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 233-4.

accompanied the prince's baptism at Stirling Castle in December 1566.<sup>41</sup> In many respects, the baptism marked the highpoint of Mary's personal rule in Scotland – she had secured the succession in a manner which her rival Elizabeth was unwilling or unable to emulate – and the lavish pageantry at Stirling was designed to ram home the point. Yet, for all the bravura of the baptismal celebrations, including a carefully choreographed feast of reconciliation in which the Scottish nobility, Catholic and Protestant alike, sat together to celebrate the continuance of the Stewart line, it was impossible to paper over the deep divisions at the heart of the Marian regime. Mary's relations with Darnley were now so soured that he did not even attend his son's baptism. Two months later he was dead, mourned by few other than his own family – and, one may surmise, their adherents. Arguably, to Buchanan, Darnley's murder, and Mary's precipitate marriage to the earl of Bothwell, the man believed to have perpetrated the deed, outweighed any sense of loyalty to the queen. Certainly, by the time Mary signed her “voluntary” abdication in July 1567, in effect surrendering authority to her half-brother, the earl of Moray, Buchanan was irrevocably in the anti-Marian camp.<sup>42</sup>

It was probably not, however, quite so simple or quite so atavistic as this suggests. After all, Buchanan was not just associated with Mary's Catholic court and household, but had for some years been an active member of the Protestant Kirk. Exactly when, and under what circumstances, he converted to Protestantism remains hard to determine with any precision. There is no evidence of the kind of cathartic spiritual experience that accounts for the conversion of so many early reformers. Of course, thanks to his earlier brushes with the ecclesiastical authorities in Scotland and Portugal, we know that his orthodoxy had long been suspect. Yet, as we have seen, this did not prevent him from formally entering the priesthood on receiving his Normandy benefice or from ingratiating himself with the militantly Catholic French court. It seems likely that this formal commitment to Catholicism was more a matter of material convenience than of

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<sup>41</sup> For what follows on the baptism, see Michael Lynch, “Queen Mary's Triumph: The Baptismal Celebrations at Stirling in December 1566”, *Scottish Historical Review*, 69 (1990), 1-21. The important *Genethliacon*, celebrating the birth of James VI, is considered further below.

<sup>42</sup> McFarlane, *Buchanan*, 320-23.



religious conviction. Ironically, and somewhat hypocritically, Buchanan tells us in his *Vita* that, when employed by the Maréchal de Brissac in the late 1550s, he immersed himself in the study of theology “in order that he might pass a more accurate judgement on the controversies which were then occupying most people’s thoughts”.<sup>43</sup> The inference of this, written towards the end of his life and, not surprisingly, making no mention of his Catholic benefice, is that his conversion was driven by intellectual rather than spiritual considerations. There is probably some truth in this: never a Protestant in the Knoxian mould, Buchanan’s approach to religion seems coolly rational rather than warmly emotional, aptly characterised by Arthur Williamson as a species of classical *pietas*.<sup>44</sup> Given that his commitment to Catholic orthodoxy was often less than wholehearted, his conversion was, one suspects, a relatively painless one.

If Randolph’s description of Buchanan in January 1562 as “honest and godly” is indeed code for Protestant, then he must have formally committed himself to the reformed faith either immediately before or immediately after his return to Scotland. Contemporaries, it is worth noting, were clearly, and justifiably, convinced of its sincerity: though Mary would later call him “a vile atheist”, his fellow Protestants never expressed an iota of doubt as to his commitment. In all probability, drawn as he was to the austere moral values of classical Stoicism, Buchanan found the simplicity and discipline of the reformed Kirk increasingly congenial. In any event, by 1563 he was a member of the Kirk’s General Assembly, serving on a commission appointed to revise *The Book of Discipline*.<sup>45</sup> Thereafter, he attended annually, sitting on a variety of committees as well as becoming increasingly, and appropriately, involved in the Protestant establishment’s strenuous efforts to reform the universities.<sup>46</sup> It was probably through his interest in educational reform that he became acquainted with Mary’s half-brother, the earl of Moray, to whom in 1566 he astutely dedicated the

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<sup>43</sup> Aitken, *Buchanan and the Lisbon Inquisition*, pp. xxiv-xxvii.

<sup>44</sup> Buchanan, *Political Poetry*, 28-9.

<sup>45</sup> *Acts and Proceedings of the General Assemblies of the Kirk of Scotland, from the year MDLX [BUK]*, ed. T. Thomson (3 vols., Bannatyne Club, 1839-45), i, 41.

<sup>46</sup> McFarlane, *Buchanan*, 215-25.



first printed edition of his *Franciscanus*.<sup>47</sup> As Prior of St Andrews, Moray retained within his gift the principalship of St Leonard's College and in the same year Buchanan was appointed to the post.<sup>48</sup> In other words, at precisely the time when Mary's regime was beginning to crack, Buchanan had the good luck or good judgement to find himself an alternative patron. It was as a client of Moray, therefore, that he served for the first and only time as moderator of the General Assembly, chairing the crucial meetings of June 1567 which saw the Kirk rallying against the beleaguered queen.<sup>49</sup> Clearly, Buchanan had thrown in his lot, not just with the anti-Marian cause, but with the man who was emerging as the most powerful force in Scottish politics. In August 1567, Moray was appointed regent on behalf of the infant James VI, while Mary was imprisoned in Lochleven.

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If Buchanan's motives for abandoning Mary in favour of Moray were clearly mixed, they need not necessarily be construed as shabby. Perhaps, indeed, it represents the cathartic moment missing from his religious conversion. It seems likely that, in the course of 1565-6, perhaps fuelled by Buchanan's visit to France and contact with French Huguenots fearful of the Guise regime, disillusionment with Mary's Catholic and Francophile court was already setting in just as Buchanan's commitment to Moray and the reformed Kirk was deepening. Certainly, the long and important poem that Buchanan wrote in celebration of Prince James's birth in July 1566 sets out an austere vision of kingship and civic responsibility that contrasts starkly – and pointedly – with the elaborate monarchical cult of honour promoted by the queen herself.<sup>50</sup> It seems likely that Buchanan was genuinely alarmed both by Mary's cultivation of monarchical grandeur and the general drift of her policies. Seen in this light, Darnley's murder, and Mary's marriage to Bothwell, were not just an affront to Buchanan's family loyalties, but an outrage to a sense of moral and religious order that had been renewed by his Protestantism and came to be personified for him in the austere figure of the earl of Moray. In any

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<sup>47</sup> Durkan, *Bibliography*, pp. 164-5: McFarlane, *Buchanan*, 295-7.

<sup>48</sup> McFarlane, *Buchanan*, 222.

<sup>49</sup> *BUK*, i, 93-99.

<sup>50</sup> *Genethliacon Jacobi Sexti Regis Scotorum*, in Buchanan, *Political Poetry*, 154-63.

event, it was as a fervent admirer as well as client of Moray that, at the age of sixty-one, Buchanan set out to defend the anti-Marian revolution of 1567. He wasted no time in putting pen to paper, for it was in the autumn of 1567 that he wrote the first and most important of his political tracts, the *De iure regni apud Scotos Dialogus*.<sup>51</sup>

As indicated at the outset, the *De iure regni* was not in fact published until 1579 and, although it is known to have circulated in manuscript, the exact relationship between what Buchanan originally wrote and what finally appeared in print is impossible to establish now with complete certainty. It is unlikely, however, that it was very extensively revised and its form and substance almost certainly remained unchanged.<sup>52</sup> In form, it is a bravura example of humanist eloquence aimed at an educated European audience and conducted as a Socratic dialogue, modelled on Plato, between Buchanan himself and Thomas Maitland, the younger brother of the queen's former secretary, William Maitland of Lethington, famously pilloried in Buchanan's *Chamaeleon* as the scheming Machiavelli of the Marian court.<sup>53</sup> Thomas understandably denied ever having participated in any such conversation with Buchanan though at the time the *De iure* was originally written the Maitland brothers had not yet defected to the Queen's party.<sup>54</sup> As to the substance of their alleged dialogue, it

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<sup>51</sup> This date, though by no means conclusive, is suggested by David Calderwood, *The History of the Church of Scotland*, ed. T. Thomson (8 vols., Wodrow Society, 1842-49), ii, 392, and is discussed more fully in W.S. McKechnie, "De Jure Regni apud Scotos", in *George Buchanan: Glasgow Quatercentenary Studies*, ed. G. Neilson (Glasgow, 1907), 211-96, at 226-9. See also Burns, *True Law of Kingship*, 186 and note 4.

<sup>52</sup> The significance of the survival of a manuscript copy of the *De iure regni*, predating the published version and containing many (essentially stylistic) variants, is considered more fully in a forthcoming critical edition of the text ed. and trans. Roger A. Mason and Martin S. Smith.

<sup>53</sup> Lethington was successful in preventing publication of the work, though it did circulate in manuscript. See *Vernacular Writings of George Buchanan*, ed. P. Hume Brown (Scottish Text Society, 1892); cf. Mark Loughlin, "'The Dialogue of the Twa Wyfeis': Maitland, Machiavelli and the Propaganda of the Scottish Civil War", in *The Renaissance in Scotland*, edd. A.A. MacDonald, M. Lynch and I.B. Cowan (Leiden, 1994), 226-45.

<sup>54</sup> For further details of Thomas Maitland's career, see W.S. McKechnie, "Thomas Maitland", *Scottish Historical Review*, 4 (1906-7), 274-93.

revolves around definitions of kingship and tyranny: while the first half of the conversation concerns itself with the reasons for the creation of kings and the necessity of subjecting them to the rule of law, the second focuses on the remedies available when a king – or tyrant – refuses to govern according to that law. Sovereignty, argues Buchanan, lies ultimately with the people as a whole, and kings are bound to rule according to the law as promulgated by the people. Should they fail to do so, thus breaking the contract entered into at their coronation, they stand self-condemned as tyrants whom the people – and even individual citizens – may justly resist, depose and execute.<sup>55</sup>

In short, Buchanan supplies a theoretical justification for tyrannicide which, by sixteenth-century standards, is quite astonishingly radical in its populism.<sup>56</sup> It is also, by the same measure, quite remarkably secular. Unlike Knox, and unlike so many other contemporary Protestant reformers who set out theories of resistance and tyrannicide, Buchanan shows little interest in anchoring his political ideas in scriptural authority. On the contrary, what one finds are arguments founded on reason and natural law which, though no doubt influenced by the scholastic philosophy of John Mair, are drawn predominantly from Buchanan's deep knowledge of classical authors such as Plato, Aristotle and Cicero. The result is a thoroughly rational – indeed, thoroughly modern-sounding – model of political society and the mutual obligations of ruler and ruled. It is also, however, a very abstract model that, despite its title, refers only occasionally to Scotland. Buchanan clearly did believe in an “ancient Scottish constitution”, founded on the principles of natural law, to which the Scots had allegedly adhered since the foundation of the kingdom in 330

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<sup>55</sup> The fullest analysis of Buchanan's political theory is in Burns, *True Law of Kingship*, 191-209; but see also Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1978), ii, 338-45, and the important article by J.H.M. Salmon, “An Alternative Theory of Popular Resistance: Buchanan, Rossaeus and Locke”, in his *Renaissance and Revolt: Essays in the Intellectual and Social History of Early Modern France* (Cambridge, 1987), 136-54.

<sup>56</sup> For this and what follows, see Roger A. Mason, “People Power? George Buchanan on Resistance and the Common Man”, in *Widerstandsrecht im deutsch-britischen Vergleich, 1488-1688*, ed. Robert von Friedeburg, forthcoming in *Beihefte der Zeitschrift für historische Forschung*.



BC and on which they had acted in AD 1567.<sup>57</sup> Yet, at best, the *De iure regni* provides only a sketch of its workings. It would be fully detailed only in the *Rerum Scoticarum Historia*.

Before turning to his other writings, however, there is one further aspect of the *De iure regni* that is worth commenting on here and that, arguably, was the determining factor in shaping the lurid portrait of Mary that Buchanan was to paint first in the *Detectio* and then on the more expansive canvas of the *Historia*. It has already been remarked more than once that in more companionable times Buchanan and Mary had been wont to spend the evenings reading Livy.<sup>58</sup> The choice of literature was surely Buchanan's, for, next to Cicero, Livy's *Ab urbe condita* was undoubtedly his favourite reading, his intimate knowledge of the text leaving its imprint throughout the pages of the *De iure regni*. The significance of this is that Livy, like Cicero, glorified the civic virtues and values of republican Rome, while lamenting the moral degeneracy that caused as well as accompanied the despotism of empire. Significantly, and again despite its title, in the *De iure regni*, it is not so much the history of Scotland that provides Buchanan with his basic frame of reference as the history of classical Rome. It is the emperors Nero, Caligula and Domitian who are repeatedly invoked as examples of tyrants unrestrained by the laws, while it is the civic values of the republic – the willingness, above all, to sacrifice private advantage to the public good – which are held up as worthy of every true citizen's emulation.

Buchanan's fervent promotion of such civic virtue is indicative, not just of his humanism, but of his indebtedness to an essentially Stoic morality through which he was able to reconcile, at least to his own satisfaction, his long-established classicism with his new-found Calvinism. Fundamental to the political theory of the *De iure regni* is an almost priggish, certainly puritanical, glorification of self-control

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<sup>57</sup> Buchanan's investment in such an ancient constitution is famously, if not altogether accurately, discussed in H. R. Trevor-Roper, "George Buchanan and the Ancient Scottish Constitution", *English Historical Review*, supplement 3 (1966). The phrase "ancient constitution", though a convenient shorthand, is itself a potentially misleading way of characterising a mode of thought that was in Buchanan's case more complex and less institutionally focused than it implies.

<sup>58</sup> *CSP Scot.*, i, 615.



and self-denial: the need, that is, to subject man's base passions and appetites to the iron rule of reason.<sup>59</sup> It is this that distinguishes a true king from a tyrant and a true citizen from a fawning flatterer. It is this also, however, and crucially for Buchanan's view of Mary, that distinguishes men from women. For in common with his classical sources and educated contemporaries, Buchanan saw reason as an essentially masculine faculty, while the passions and appetites were associated with femininity. His tyrants are thus monsters of effeminacy, weak men whose powers of rational self-control and denial have been overwhelmed by such base instincts as vanity, greed, anger and lust. It followed that only through education and austere self-discipline could men learn to control their appetites and thus be fit to participate in civic life. Women, however, possessed of weaker powers of reason, much more prone to be swayed by their passions, rash, inconstant, capricious, duplicitous and licentious, were ill-equipped for any form of political participation.<sup>60</sup>

It is this view of women's inability to control their passions, and thus their unfitness for rule, that proved fundamental in shaping Buchanan's portrait of Mary's tyranny. It is not, however, a picture that emerges in the *De iure regni*, which is concerned less with the specifics of Mary's rule than with outlining a powerful, but theoretical case for the accountability of kings to their subjects. By the time Buchanan completed the *De iure regni*, however, probably in the spring of 1568, circumstances were changing very rapidly and in ways that necessitated a very different approach to the problem Mary presented. For in May 1568, the deposed queen escaped confinement in Lochleven Castle, was

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<sup>59</sup> This theme is explored in Roger A. Mason, "Rex Stoicus: George Buchanan, James VI and the Scottish Polity", in *New Perspectives on the Politics and Culture of Early Modern Scotland*, edd. J. Dwyer, R.A. Mason and A. Murdoch (Edinburgh, 1982), 9-33.

<sup>60</sup> The effeminacy of tyrants is a theme explored from classical models to Renaissance playwrights such as Buchanan in Rebecca W. Bushnell, *Tragedies of Tyrants: Political Thought and Theater in the English Renaissance* (Ithaca and London, 1990); see also David Norbrook, "Macbeth and the Politics of Historiography", in *Politics of Discourse: The Literature and History of Seventeenth Century England*, edd. K. Sharp and S. Zwicker (Berkeley, 1987), 78-116, esp. 103, where Buchanan's attitude to female rule is similarly explained in terms of his "dislike of irrationality and emotionalism".

defeated (somewhat unluckily) at the battle of Langside, and fled immediately to England in the mistaken belief that Elizabeth would help restore her to her throne. In fact, Elizabeth found Mary's presence in England as unwelcome as it was unexpected and, faced with the choice of restoring or executing her, chose instead the third way of prevarication: before making any decision on her future, Elizabeth (or her commissioners) would hear the case for and against the Scottish queen. Moray's regime was asked, therefore, not so much to justify the constitutional revolution of July 1567 as to substantiate their claim that Mary had had direct involvement in the murder of her husband.<sup>61</sup> In this context, the theoretical arguments for popular sovereignty and the accountability of kings to their subjects, so brilliantly expounded in the *De iure regni*, were of no use at all. Not only would Elizabeth have been utterly appalled by their radically subversive tenor, but they had no bearing whatsoever on Mary's guilt or innocence.

In the *De iure regni*, in so far as Buchanan considered the matter at all, he had simply assumed Mary's complicity in Darnley's murder and had made no effort to prove it. Now, however, in the summer of 1568, it was precisely such proof that was required and precisely such proof that Buchanan helped to supply. By October, Moray and his commissioners, including Buchanan, were on their way to York to present the case against the deposed queen. They came armed with a detailed indictment of Mary's conduct as well as the infamous Casket Letters that were alleged to contain proof positive not only of Mary's involvement in the murder of her husband but also of her adulterous relationship with his murderer. The truth about the Casket Letters is beyond recall, but that they contained some element of forgery or manipulation seems very likely, and it is conceivable that Buchanan had a hand in their production.<sup>62</sup> Much more conclusive is the role he played in drawing up the series of Latin and English versions of the indictment against Mary that would finally be published in 1571 as the *Detectio Mariae Reginae Scotorum*. McFarlane's description of Buchanan as "an amanuensis of a high order" is perhaps more fittingly

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<sup>61</sup> See Gordon Donaldson, *The First Trial of Mary Queen of Scots* (London, 1969), for a full analysis of the proceedings.

<sup>62</sup> McFarlane, *Buchanan*, 320-30, discusses Buchanan's possible role in drawing up the evidence against Mary and involvement in the production of the Casket Letters.

applied to his role in compiling the salacious farrago of the *Detectio* than it is to any of his other anti-Marian writings. Buchanan was simply putting into literary form, albeit with considerable skill and venom, material provided for him. Not so much tendentious as thoroughly mendacious, it will suffice here to say that throughout its relatively short length Mary is variously described as “inconstant”, “rash”, “capricious”, “arrogant”, “disdainful”, “lustful”, “hateful” and “cruel” in precisely the way that the argument of the *De iure regni* might lead one to expect.<sup>63</sup> Not surprisingly, moreover, the same adjectives, and many others besides, feature equally prominently in the *Rerum Scotticarum Historia*, where Buchanan had far greater scope to anatomise Mary’s descent into vicious tyranny.

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By far his longest work, a full-scale history of Scotland in twenty books from the earliest mythical times to Buchanan’s own day, the *Historia* was published in 1582, probably just after its author had died. Buchanan had almost certainly begun working on some sort of history of Scotland long before Mary’s overthrow – before, indeed, his return to Scotland in 1561. Nevertheless, the work as we have it was largely written in the 1570s when Buchanan, engaged as tutor to James VI, was able to reflect at leisure on the events of the previous decade.<sup>64</sup> For all its literary merits, therefore, and for all its considerable chronological sweep, it is first and foremost a work of propaganda, skilfully orchestrated to highlight Mary’s tyranny and glorify the heroic virtue of her opponents. Seen in this light, rather than as a failed attempt at impartial history, it is a brilliant performance. From the very outset, Buchanan depicts an austere and thoroughly masculine Scottish political world in which virtuous kings live soberly according to the law, while vicious tyrants, masters of effeminate depravity and duplicity, are held to account by noblemen selflessly devoted to the

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<sup>63</sup> The *Detectio* is translated in full in Gatherer, *Tyrannous Reign*, 165-80. For its complex publishing history, in Latin and English, see Durkan, *Bibliography*, pp. xiv, 203-8, and McFarlane, *Buchanan*, 344-54.

<sup>64</sup> The fullest account of the writing of the *Historia* is in Trevor-Roper, “Buchanan and the Ancient Constitution”, 16ff; cf. McFarlane, *Buchanan*, 416-24.



commonweal of the realm.<sup>65</sup> As a result, by the time one reaches Book XVII and the personal rule of Mary, the civic values of republican Rome, the public virtues so prized by Livy and Cicero, are as familiar to the reader as they allegedly were to the uncorrupted part of the nobility who watched in dismay as their young queen's "surface gloss of virtue" was gradually stripped away by the corrosive power of her own uncontrolled appetites. As Buchanan's narrative unfolds, Mary emerges in her true colours as a tyrant, a latter-day Nero or Caligula, a victim of lust, greed and ambition, increasingly portrayed as a manipulative dissimulator. Only the sense of civic duty that still persists in public-spirited nobles such as Morton, Glencairn and, above all, Moray, men of reason and virtue who remain impervious to her feminine wiles, ensure that her tyranny is brought to an end and order finally restored to the Scottish commonwealth.<sup>66</sup>

There is no doubt that Moray is the real hero of the later books of the *Historia*, his "austerity" and "integrity" constantly contrasted with Mary's "licentiousness". To be sure, Buchanan initially credits Mary with "surpassing loveliness of form, the vigour of maturing youth, and fine qualities of mind", but this, he goes on, "far from being genuine, was a mere shadowy representation of virtue; so that her natural goodness would be weakened by an earnest desire to please; and the seeds of virtue, wizened by the allurements of luxury, would be prevented from reaching ripeness and fruition".<sup>67</sup> Moray, on the other hand, is consistently portrayed as the embodiment of civic virtue, utterly rational and self-controlled, and clearly for Buchanan the ideal masculine ruler, deprived of the Scottish throne only by the misfortune of his bastardy. His assassination in January 1570 robbed the Scottish kingdom of its greatest political leader just as it robbed Buchanan of his

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<sup>65</sup> In doing so he refined the Livian approach to early Scottish history found in Hector Boece's *Scotorum Historia* of 1527, a prime source of Buchanan's own view of the Scottish past. The significance of this is more fully discussed in Roger A. Mason, "Civil Society and the Celt: George Buchanan and the Ancient Scottish Past", in *In Search of the Scots: Nation, Identity and History in Scotland's Past*, edd. E.J. Cowan and R. Finlay (forthcoming).

<sup>66</sup> This and what follows owes much to the interpretation of Books XVII-XIX of the *Historia* advanced in the perceptive introduction to Gatherer, *Tyrannous Reign*, 1-42.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 53-4.



most generous patron. Thomas Randolph later reported to Cecil that Buchanan “hath not rejoiced since the regent’s death”,<sup>68</sup> and Book XIX of the *Historia* culminates with an encomium to Moray’s public virtue and private piety. Not only was his private household a model of Christian piety, “a holy temple” where Scripture was discussed over dinner by “illustrious scholars”, but he was revered by the common people as “a public parent” who had quelled “disorder and confusion” throughout the kingdom and who was admired for “his bravery in war, joined with a decided predilection for peace”. Moreover, Buchanan concludes, his “uprightness of manners and the purity of his life” ensured that he was “venerated not only by his countrymen, but by strangers and foreign nations, especially the English, among whom his virtues were more particularly known in every variety of fortune”.<sup>69</sup>

Elevating Moray to such heroic stature, however, undoubtedly did pose some serious narrative problems for Buchanan, problems that become particularly apparent in relation to Mary’s marriage to Lord Darnley. As has already been suggested, Buchanan’s sense of kinship with the Lennox family ensured not only that they are treated sympathetically throughout the *Historia*, but also that Buchanan looked favourably on Darnley’s marriage to the queen of Scots. Yet it was hardly possible for him to deny that Moray had actually opposed the match. Although initially instrumental in rehabilitating the Lennox Stewarts and facilitating the family’s return to Scotland in 1563, the threat a Catholic marriage posed both to the reformed Kirk and his policy of amity with England led Moray into the abortive “Chaseabout Raid” and his own English exile. Buchanan was thus faced with the dual dilemma of explaining away Moray’s rebellion against Mary, while painting a portrait of Darnley which, if not unduly flattering, at least suppressed the less savoury aspects of his meretricious personality and shifted the blame for the subsequent collapse of his marriage onto someone else’s shoulders. The answer to his dilemma came in the form of David Riccio, whose otherwise obscure career is fleshed out by Buchanan in a manner that has little evidence to corroborate it but has done much to fix the Savoyard’s popular image as a low-born, foreign,

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<sup>68</sup> *CSP Scot.*, i, 279.

<sup>69</sup> George Buchanan, *History of Scotland*, trans. James Aikman, 4 vols. (Glasgow, 1827), ii, 572-3.

Catholic schemer.<sup>70</sup> It was, according to Buchanan, the treacherous and corrupting influence of Riccio that first turned Mary against her half-brother – forcing him into a public-spirited act of rebellion – and then against her husband, the naïve and innocent victim of Riccio’s subtle machinations. More seriously still, of course, it was Riccio who brought out the full implications of the queen’s innate licentiousness, not only revealing her personal corruption by becoming her lover, but at the same time encouraging her to employ a bodyguard of foreign mercenaries, a sure sign that the foundations of her political tyranny were being well and truly laid.<sup>71</sup>

This farrago may bear little relation to the known facts of history, but it is rhetorically highly effective. Buchanan succeeds in exonerating Moray and Darnley from blame while portraying Mary as the weak and lascivious tool of Riccio’s vainglorious ambition. As a result, Riccio’s murder, the climax of Book XVII, is in a sense the climax of Buchanan’s entire narrative. The aged and infirm Lord Ruthven, the leader of the band who broke into the queen’s apartments at Holyrood and assassinated Riccio, has in Buchanan’s pages all the austere dignity of a civic-minded Roman senator. Too ill to remain on his feet, he asks pardon “for addressing her [the queen] while she was standing and he was seated” before going on to advise her that “in ruling the kingdom she should consult the nobility, who were concerned for the country’s safety, rather than worthless tramps, who could give no pledge of their loyalty, since they had neither property nor reputation to lose”. He then concludes, in terms that serve to epitomise Buchanan’s view of the Scottish polity, by saying that the murder that had just occurred was “no new thing”:

The authority of Scottish kings derived from the law: the kingdom was not accustomed to be ruled by the whims of one person, but according to the written law and the consent of the nobility. Any kings who attempted to overthrow this practice had paid dearly for their rashness. The Scots were not so far fallen from the standards of their ancestors as calmly to allow a

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<sup>70</sup> See Gatherer, *Tyrannous Reign*, 22-6, on the significance of Buchanan’s portrait of Riccio and the remarkably flimsy evidence on which it is based.

<sup>71</sup> For Buchanan’s narrative, see *ibid.*, 81-95.

foreigner, hardly worthy to be a servant, not only to rule them but to reduce them to servitude.<sup>72</sup>

If this is characteristic of Buchanan's "ancient constitutionalism", it is equally characteristic of his rhetorical method that Mary is not permitted to respond to Ruthven's words. While the episode is more dramatic than is often the case in Buchanan's *Historia*, involving a real confrontation between Mary and her subjects, it is ultimately a one-sided affair that lacks the passionate interchange of ideas to be found in Knox's *History*. More usually, in fact, Buchanan keeps Mary firmly in the background, insinuating her tyranny from afar, as it were, just as she is portrayed using her feminine wiles behind the scenes to manipulate men and events. The result, as suggested at the outset, is that in contrast to Knox's Mary, Buchanan's is a distant and disembodied figure – gendered certainly, but hardly personalised. Ultimately, the queen of Scots emerges from Buchanan's *Historia* as a dehumanised abstraction, a stereotype of the feminised tyrant.

Of course, from a modern standpoint, this is all thoroughly bad history. But anyone who reads Buchanan in the expectation of finding an impartial account of events is bound to be disappointed – and very probably shocked. As Gatherer has pointed out, Buchanan approached history as a humanist rhetorical exercise and was, moreover, quite deliberately and shamelessly writing it in support of a partisan cause.<sup>73</sup> From Buchanan's point of view, the measure of its success would not be its accuracy or impartiality but its plausibility and persuasiveness. Judged against such yardsticks, it proved in fact highly successful: just as the *Historia* became the focus of intense ideological debate throughout the early modern period and beyond, so Mary has never quite managed to shake off the image that Buchanan created of a licentious, murdering tyrant. Nor, seen from this perspective, is it at all surprising that Buchanan should have glossed over his own earlier association with the queen. Family loyalties and ideological conviction converged in 1566-7 to persuade him that in politics and religion as well as in gender Moray had much more to offer a Calvinist-humanist than did Queen Mary. It is easy enough to brand Buchanan a cynical opportunist and partisan hack. Such epithets, however, do little to

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<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 10-18.



advance our understanding either of his complex relations with Mary and the extended Stewart kin or the ideological pressures that shaped his – and posterity’s – perceptions of the “daughter of debate”.

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